



It's your choice

When we make the Guardian available to you online, we use cookies and similar technologies to help us to do this. Some are necessary to help our website work properly and can't be switched off, and some are optional but support the Guardian and your experience in other ways.

For instance, we and our [partners](#) may store cookies and other similar technologies to access personal data, including page visits and your IP address. We use this information about you, your devices and your online interactions with us to provide, analyse and improve our services. This may include personalising content or advertising for you.

We use cookies and similar technologies for the following purposes:

- ✓ Store and/or access information on a device
- ✓ Personalised ads and content, ad and content measurement, audience insights and product development

You can find out more in our [privacy policy](#) and [cookie policy](#), and manage the choices available to you at any time by going to 'Privacy settings' at the bottom of any page.

Are you happy to accept cookies?

To manage or reject cookies, or to opt out where our partners rely on legitimate interests to use your information, **click on Manage or reject cookies.**

Yes, I'm happy

Manage or reject cookies

Before [Brexit](#), checks on passports of drivers, passengers and schoolchildren on coach tours were cursory, but queues have built up because of the return of coach travel and the post-Brexit requirement that border police “wet stamp” passports and check that the passenger is not overstaying.

At Easter, coaches were taking up to an hour to process.

Anthony Marett, chair of the coach operators’ association UKCOA, said: “Easter was a perfect storm. You had coach travel returning at a scale not seen since the pandemic. You had all of the coaches descending on one infrastructure all at the same time. The net result of it was just pandemonium.” He added: “If they introduce further checks that lead to delays, we think there will be quite a serious incident.”

Under the new entry and exit system (EES) the EU planned to introduce in November, passengers would have to agree to fingerprinting and facial image capture the first time they arrived on the continent. After that, the data, including any record of refused entry, should allow quicker processing, said John Keefe, the head of public affairs at Eurotunnel.

The problem for Eurotunnel and Dover is there is no room to expand to create first-time registration zones for EES.

“We support the process to get to smart borders where more data is exchanged in advance and the process at the border post itself is conducted electronically. All of that is because it should speed things up. It is the enrolment process that is the issue,” said Keefe.

He said problems included the technology proposed by the EU to conduct checks after the enrolment, using facial recognition. There was no guarantee, he said, that the scanners would work through tinted glass, often seen in back-seat passenger windows. If they did not, passengers would have to get out of their vehicle, adding to safety concerns.

There were also concerns, Keefe said, around mixed carloads. EU passport-holders would not undergo the checks but would be unable to go through fast-track gates if they were travelling with family or friends holding British passports.

Bannister said the port had a good working relationship with France, and confirmed there had been suggestions of moving the fingerprinting processing centre somewhere such as Sevington in Kent.

But the Department for [Transport](#) confirmed the EU would have to change its regulations to allow fingerprinting off-site.

Complicating the matter is lack of clarity over what data will be captured at the point of exit from the UK, and how much might be uploaded at home.

“Our modelling is in a way all over the place, because with a couple of small variable changes it goes from being manageable to unacceptable,” Bannister said. “‘Manageable’ means peak periods with queues of between 45 and 90 minutes. If we’re getting into that kind of processing where you know, there’s delays of 12 or 14 hours, I’d say that’s clearly unacceptable,” he added.

Nichola Mallon, the head of trade at Logistics UK, said the knock-on effect on trade was a concern. Queues of coaches would prevent trucks boarding and miss supermarket deliveries, for instance. “Our members hope the introduction is delayed,” she said.

A government spokesperson said it had recently met coach operators to discuss the implementation of new EU entry and exit system checks, and was “working closely with port authorities and the French government to make sure passengers do not experience unnecessary delays”.

Bannister and Keefe said relations with French counterparts were good after Rishi Sunak’s meeting with Emmanuel Macron in March, when the prime minister had hailed “unprecedented cooperation” with France.

While the EU still says it is on track with the November 2023 introduction, sources say that “is not going to happen”.

A source at the meetings with French authorities said: “The only question is whether the enrolment will be pushed back until spring 2024, or until after the Olympics in July and August in Paris. There is an EU meeting on 9 June and we are hoping there will be confirmation from there that it is being pushed back to 2024 ... That is what everyone is waiting to find out.”

Most viewed
